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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Thursday, July 20, 1944

Subject: "FOOD BUYING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS" Information from distribution officials of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Judging from the number of questions in the basket today about shopping problems, it's apparent that homemakers everywhere want to feed their families well, but are not always sure of what to buy.

One woman writes that she knows fruits and vegetables are important in her family's diet, but-well, here's what she says: "Our family is large and our income is small. How can I get more for my money from my fruits and vegetables?" That's a big order to try and fill. But it's a reasonable question, and one that may be bothering some of you, too. Most homemakers are interested in stretching their dollars as far as they will go. Unfortunately not all of us can have Victory gardens. Some of us are still dependent upon the grocery stores for our supplies of fresh vegetables and fruits.

The home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have a number of good suggestions on this topic. First of all, when you go shopping, remember that the fresher the vegetable the more food value it contains. That's important. Although most of you know this, it's worth considering again. Locally grown foods are usually cheaper than the imported perishables. So don't snub the home-grown products if you are really interested in economy.

Some knowledge of the comparative nutritional values of fruits and vegetables is helpful of course, in making a wise selection - but if you keep in mind a few general pieces of information, you can't go far wrong. Potatoes and sweet potatoes

should be frequent vegetables in the diet. They are good sources for a number of necessary nutrients, and are usually available and reasonably priced. Although our question centers on fresh vegetables it also is concerned with economy, and from that angle we can't omit dried beans and peas. Both beans and peas are excellent sources for calories, protein, minerals and Vitamin B1.

Leafy and green vegetables we need, too, in a well balanced diet. And this is worth remembering about them: that the thinner and greener the leaf, the higher its vitamin A value and iron tends to be. Varieties of greens are numerous but the selections vary with the region in which you live. Those of you who go tramping into the country should keep an eye open for wild greens that are good eating, such as: dandelion, lambsquarters, plantain, poke, and several others. And when you buy a bunch of beets, cook the tops, too, if they are young and tender, to get the most out of your purchase. So much for green grocery shopping.

The best advice for the selection of fruits after you have your supply of citrus fruits and tomatoes is to choose the most economical in price of the fruits that your family like best. When storage space is available it is sometimes thrifty to buy in bushel quantities the fruit that keeps well. Fruit parings, especially from apples and pears, can amount to a considerable loss on the original investment.

One woman who was impressed with the amount of food that is often trimmed off the vegetables and fruits decided to try a little experiment. She peeled 5 nice-size potatoes and one bunch of carrots, and trimmed the outside leaves from a head of cabbage and a head of lettuce, cut the tops off a bunch of celery and a bunch of beets. She had weighed them before trimming, and then after trimming. She found that she had thrown away 18 percent of her \$0.83 worth of vegetables, which amounted to a loss of 16 cents. Almost all of the trimmings were good edible food. So much for that question. Let's take the next.

"Does a dent in a can spoil the contents," one homemaker asks. The answer

is "No". If the can is not punctured the food is as good as the food in a perfectly shaped can. In these days of labor shortage, we can't expect perfect merchandise. The same is true of food in boxes - cereals, dried fruits and vegetables. A dent in the box won't hurt the food inside.

Question 3 is one that almost everybody would like to be able to answer. And the best that any one person can do is to try. This letter comes from a discouraged homemaker who is also a war worker. She asks: "Do you know any shortcuts for this business of shopping for food?" Shopping is difficult now. But there are a number of ways - hardly shortcuts; let's call them efficiency aids - that will make shopping easier.

Those who are free to select the time of day for shopping can help the war workers, the grocery clerks and themselves by shopping when the store traffic is lightest. You can do something else for those people who have to shop late. When you select vegetables and fruits try to depend upon your eyes and nose instead of your fingers for judging quality and ripeness. Pinching and handling perishable food causes the grocers a big loss in money and depletes the available supply for the late shopper.

By all means have a shopping list. Plan for several days ahead so you get what you want without hesitation and uncertainty. However, with the uncertainty of finding your first choice on the shelf it's well to know of a second or third choice you can use instead. People who adapt their buying to fit the pattern of surpluses and shortages of food simplify their own shopping and certainly contribute to solving a big national problem.

Another hint for shoppers is concerned with paper bags. In the next few months paper bags and cartons will be scarce, so it might be a good idea if you take your own shopping bag along to the store. In other words when you go to the stores to buy food go prepared. Check your grocery list; be sure you have your ration points and money; and to be on the safe side take a market basket or bag with you.

